

ADMINISTRATOR MINUTE

Australia Day 2024 in Berrima drew a crowd of about 5000 people and was alive with vibrant activities.

The day started with a Citizenship Ceremony with 31 people from 10 countries, including Philippines, South Africa, Germany, United Kingdom, United States of America, India, New Zealand, Thailand, Kenya & Isle of Man becoming Citizens. It was a pleasure to welcome the Federal Member for Whitlam, the Hon. Stephen Jones MP and Member for Goulburn, Wendy Tuckerman MP to the ceremony.

Prior to the ceremony, an address was given by our Australia Day Ambassador, Ms Robina Beard OAM. Following the ceremony, it was a privilege to announce Uta and Dennis Purcell as our 2024 Citizens of the Year and Mackenzie Isedale as the Young Citizen of the Year. The large tent for the ceremony was filled to capacity with standing room on the outside only.

Classic cars, roving entertainment, and a flourishing sense of community spirit filled the streets. Local businesses thrived, with the first public opening since its decommissioning and sale of Berrima Gaol a standout attraction. Venues like Berrima Bakehouse, Berrima Vault House, Surveyor General Inn, and Schmokin added special touches to the village experience, not to mention Carol from Mrs Oldbucks Pantry handing out free lolly bags to all visitors.

The Grand Parade showcased the First Light Horse Brigade, Highlands Pipes & Drums, RFS, SES, Police and CWA, together with other community groups creating a joyous atmosphere.

The event injected life into Berrima during the typically quiet summer holiday break, fostering a strong sense of community spirit. Marketplace Park thrived with stalls, rides, live music, and picnic blankets, creating a lively ambiance. Council's pop-up garnered community engagement, adding to the overall excitement.

The success of this Australia Day celebration marks a promising start to the year, reinforcing a cherished Southern Highlands Australia Day tradition in collaboration with the Berrima Village Community.

I would also recognise and congratulate the following on their national recognition:

- Professor Ian Bickerton OAM – for his distinguished service to tertiary education and mental health support organisations
- Mr Peter Reynolds OAM – for his distinguished service to Local Government and the community through a range of roles
- Mr Peter Lowry AM – whilst a Sydney lower north shore resident, Peter is a well known as a business operator in the Berrima Community.

On Saturday, 23 December 2023 I was contacted by the General Manager in relation to the deterioration occurring at the southern end of Old South Road just 24 hours after it was reopened. I was advised that the issue was with the surface and that the contractor and designer were on site together with Council's Project Manager, and that in view of the importance of the road as an eastern thoroughfare in the Shire, a decision had been made to keep it open, notwithstanding the deterioration. I was also advised that nothing really could be done over the festive season and that geotechnical investigations would commence as soon as possible, and that appropriate messaging was in place.

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It was disappointing to be alerted, to what I consider, inappropriate, ill-informed and immature comments on social media in relation to the problems at Old South Road and although a Council and its workers can be slow moving targets, I had hoped that some of the toxicity from people who should know better was a thing of the past.

A late report will be presented at the Council meeting in relation to the matter and from the information that has been made available to me, Council officers have been both professional and diligent and notice has been served on the contractor to remedy the matter without recourse to public funds.

I note that Councils adopted Community Engagement Strategy is to be reviewed in December 2024. This is appropriate having regard to the election to be held in September 2024.

The strategy makes no reference to third party media involvement – both print and radio. Additionally, in my view it relies too heavily on Council's social media platforms that disadvantage some in the community.

Additionally, Council considered a report from KPMG in late 2021 that outlined that tactical, strategic and transformation actions that have been progressively implemented. In short, one of the recommendations of the KPMG report was that Council had too many sources of information and I took that to mean it should be coordinated and placed in a weekly newsletter.

There has been a resistance on the part of the Administration to the use of coreflutes when consulting with the community and I applaud what has happened in Bowral with the consultations on the Draft Town Centre Masterplan. I hope this is a precursor to a greater use of this medium which is both cost effective and easily recognised.

In view of the fact that there is to be a major review of the Community Engagement Strategy later in the year, I have asked the General Manager to present to the March meeting a short report on the implementation of the recommendations in the KPMG report and the engagement strategy generally to address the matters raised in the minute as an informal addendum so it is clear for residents what exactly happens when Council consults.

Tuesday, 13 February 2024 was not a normal day for Council's water crews when late in the afternoon there was a major incident at Sutton Forest where there was a structural failure in a hydrant. When dealing with this matter, a five-meter pipeline fracture under the railway bridge near Yerrinbool resulted in a total loss of water to the Village. While I think that generally all Council employees do a great job, special mention must be made of Water and Sewer operational staff who are on call 24/7 to ensure the provision of services – as sometimes things just go wrong.

In relation to the Yerrinbool incident, I am advised it was first logged at Council at 4:06pm, with a team tasked (from Sutton Forest) at 4:26pm. Arriving on site at 5:00pm, the burst was located at 5:10pm and isolated at 5:20pm. The operational team was quick to advise management it was not an easy fix and would take many hours – even if everything went well.

Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier it was under a railway bridge that required approval from the State Government and ARTC staff only allowed the team to commence their repair around 8:00pm. The repair was completed at 11:26pm requiring recharging and flushing to ensure water quality and normal services resumed around midnight.

In my view, Council management should have been more proactive in dealing with this matter, dispatching a potable water tanker to the Village and making bottled water available – there were options available including RFS, SES and contractors, and I have

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asked the General Manager to report to the March meeting on a policy to ensure Council does its best to ensure there is no repeat.

I can now report that in consultation with the independent facilitator the following dates should be noted for prospective candidates for the September 2024 election and I hope to be in a position to list final details including topic headings and speakers within the next two – three weeks.

Session 1: 10 April 2024 - 3:30pm - 6:00 pm/Council Chambers

Session 2: 8 May 2024 - 3:30pm – 6.00pm /Council Chambers

Session 3: 12 June 2024 - 3:30pm – 6.00pm/Council Chambers

Additionally, I remind prospective candidates that Council does not run the election and that the NSW Electoral Commission (NSWEC) is responsible. Candidates are encouraged to view the tools and information available on the NSWEC website. In addition, the NSWEC will be conducting a series of information webinars for candidates in the lead up to the elections which will commence in March 2024.

The NSWEC candidate helpdesk is now available to candidates and has resources to assist and can be contacted via:

Phone: 1300 022 011

Email: candidates@elections.nsw.gov.au

Website: elections.nsw.gov.au

The Great Southern Railway dissects the Shire from north to south and is major state infrastructure. My understanding is that the rail corridor is leased to ARTC and all infrastructure managed by UGL Regional Linx and I assume this has been outsourced following a tender process.

There are a number of bridges, both vehicular and pedestrian, that are constructed across the corridor and that service both State and Local roads – many of which were built decades ago.

I have asked the General Manager to obtain from the Government the proposed five and ten year programs specified under the contracts for the maintenance, improvement/upgrade or replacement of bridges so that residents are well aware of what is forecast as no doubt any third party would have to specify same in their tender responses.

It is continually raised with me the complexity that both residents and community groups have in undertaking work on Council property by virtue of various Council policies/protocols.

This applies not only to improvement works to Council owned infrastructure but gutter crossings, drainage, footpaths. There are a number of issues here including volunteer liability and whether volunteers should have to take responsibility for acquittal of any grant or whether they have the option to ask the Council to undertake the works, DA processes etc. In addition, private works associated with development perhaps could be streamlined by the Council having a list of authorised contractors.

I am not suggesting that these processes are not relevant or necessary, however it is timely that Council review these matters to canvas options that may streamline processes that I am told a cumbersome and bureaucratic, and I have asked the General Manager to provide a report including a review of sample regional and metropolitan Council policies.